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TAGS: PREL KISL KPAL KWBG IS JO

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING HAMAS BACKFIRES ON MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

REF: AMMAN 2613

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. Most Jordanian elite support U.S. backing of Palestinian President Abbas, and most Jordanians support Fatah over Hamas in their current conflict. The Islamic Action Front's support for Hamas' takeover in Gaza has backfired against the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Jordan because of the level of Hamas violence in Gaza and public revulsion at Hamas' desecration of Palestinian national symbols. After initially celebrating Hamas' victory, Jordan's MB is now back-peddling, urging internal Palestinian self-restraint between Hamas and Fatah, and a balanced international approach to the two. The public mood in Jordan forced the MB to change tack after Jordanians of many political persuasions registered their disapproval of Hamas' takeover of Gaza and the violence with which it was done.
End Summary.

Hamas Gaza Actions Hurt MB in Jordan

¶12. (S) Embassy contacts have told Ambassador and emboffs that Hamas' actions in Gaza had a negative impact on the popularity of Hamas, as well as that of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. The head of Jordan's Public Security Directorate MG Mohammad Majed al-Eitan (an East Bank "blue blood") emphasized this trend to Ambassador, as did former Prime Minister (of Palestinian origin) Taher al-Masri. Eitan, however, expressed confusion about how the U.S. envisions moving toward a two-state solution under the circumstances, and showed concern that if violence erupts in the West Bank, Jordan's interests would be affected.

¶13. (S) Other Jordanian reactions to U.S. policy following the turmoil in Gaza have been mixed. Several contacts at a social function hosted by Prince Hassan suggested the U.S. tone down its embrace of President Abbas as it made us appear to be inciting a civil war. Senator Akil Biltaji (a Jordanian-Palestinian) believed our policy was just right, and hoped we would move rapidly on the diplomatic front. Retired Ambassador and media columnist Hassan Abu Nimeh thought it was time for us to talk directly or indirectly with Hamas on reconciliation. Ambassador challenged this argument, and was supported by another former Jordanian Ambassador, one of the elder statesmen among Jordan's foreign policy experts.

Hamas Brutality, MB Celebrations Backfire

¶14. (C) Hamas' actions have hurt its image in Jordan. Video footage of Hamas lowering the Palestinian flag and raising its own flag in its place was a particularly symbolic image, among many others, that has resonated negatively with the Jordanian public, which is 60 per cent Palestinian.

¶15. (C) One post contact repeated to us the story told to him

by a Jordanian whose brother was killed by Hamas. The brother, who was described as a leftist and unaffiliated with Fatah, was ordered by Hamas gunmen to surrender and exit his house stripped to his underwear. He was killed when he refused. Similar tactics were cited by Jordanians of diverse affiliations as evocative of Israeli occupation.

¶6. (C) The MB's celebratory actions following the Gaza violence exacerbated this negative trend in perceptions of Islamists. Post contacts who work closely with the Palestinian community in Jordan reported that local Muslim Brotherhood offices distributed sweets in at least two areas to celebrate Hamas' "victory" in Gaza - in the Baqa' Palestinian refugee camp and at a social and sports club for affiliates of the Muslim Brotherhood. Such celebrations, in light of the brutishness of the Hamas takeover, have hurt the MB in the eyes of many Jordanians.

¶7. (C) These same contacts, however, also warned emboffs that if U.S. or Israeli actions to isolate Gaza involve imposing stifling sanctions (i.e. cut offs of fuel, power or water), such efforts would inadvertently rehabilitate Hamas' former image as the "true resistance to Israeli occupation." They urged the U.S. to persuade Israel to work with the new government and demonstrate that the path of moderation was viable, and said Abbas would need tangible results to prove that there was benefit in choosing the moderate path.

MB Back-peddles Fast

¶8. (C) After initially issuing statements that were supportive of Hamas' takeover of Gaza (reftel), Jordan's MB is now back-peddling quickly after re-reading the public mood

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in Jordan against the excessive violence employed by Hamas in Gaza.

¶9. (C) The IAF weekly Al-Sabil published a Muslim Brotherhood statement aimed at nuance and damage control. While supportive of Hamas, the statement stressed the legitimacy of President Abbas, demanded that Hamas, Fatah and the Palestinian presidency exercise self-restraint, called for respecting the results of the Palestinian elections, asked the Arab governments to have a balanced position on the issue, called for the unity of the Palestinian cause, land and people, and called on "our Jordanian Government" to invoke the spirit of Jordanian unity and its solidarity with the Palestinian cause. In the course of the statement, the MB warned the Arabs, the Palestinians and the Jordanians from submitting to U.S. pressure and from falling prey to "Zionist plans." The statement shifted from the MB's earlier unflinching support of Hamas (while maintaining criticism of Fatah corruption and its role in the crisis) to one of calling on all parties for restraint, reaffirming the legitimacy of Abbas as President, calling for unity and casting blame on the U.S. and Israel.

¶10. (SBU) The IAF's attempts to stifle criticism of Hamas' actions within the Higher Coordination Committee of the Opposition Parties (which it chairs) have further eroded its public support. Al-Rai, an independent Arabic daily, quoted on June 19 a "leader in an opposition party" as condemning the "unacceptable" practices of the IAF. Al-Rai reported that opposition members had sharp discussion with the IAF, condemned what happened in Gaza -specifically the internecine fighting and use of military force - as a crime against the Palestinian struggle, and argued that what Hamas did was unjustified and incomprehensible.

Internet Polls Split Between Hamas/Fatah

¶11. (U) Two new internet polls in Jordan are noteworthy in the light they shed on gauging public opinion. One poll on

www.ammonnews.net asked, "who do you think will finally win?"

Hamas won with 52 per cent of the respondents answering Hamas, and 48 per cent backing Fatah in the unscientific poll.

¶12. (U) A second poll, asked what the political repercussions following Gaza will be. Of the respondents to the unscientific www.elaph.com poll, 41 per cent signaled that it signals the end of the dream of an independent Palestinian state, 24 per cent indicated it would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state, 22 per cent indicated it would lead to an Israeli re-occupation of Gaza and 13 per cent thought that the emergency government would return things to normal.

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